

## Seeking a Bride, Part 1; the Journey (John 4:1–6)

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### Introduction

John's Gospel differs from the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) in stressing the hostility the Jews had with Christ. John shows that Jesus was God come in the flesh but was rejected by the Jews because He did not fit their preconceived expectation of what the Messiah would be. Their understanding of the Christ was based on what the prophets revealed about His second coming. Although His first coming was revealed—the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, for example—the Jews deliberately rejected this revelation because it did not fit their narrative.

John gives us a glimpse of this with Nicodemus, who came to Jesus after seeing His miracles/signs in Jerusalem during the beginning of His ministry in Judea. No doubt, Nicodemus was expecting Jesus to bring in the kingdom of God through a military-like overthrow of their Gentile domination. He expected to be included as a co-regent due to his leadership among the Pharisees. Jesus informed him that the present aspect of the kingdom was spiritual in nature and that he would not be included unless and until he was born anew by the Spirit of God. Jesus came to be lifted up as a sacrifice, giving eternal life to all who believed in His name.

John then gave the testimony of John the Baptist, the last of the prophets of the old covenant. John revealed that he was sent only as *the friend of the Bridegroom* to prepare the way. His mission was accomplished, and his joy was now complete (3:29). The Father gave all things into the Son's hand. Now, "*Whoever believes in the Son has [not will get] eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*" (3:36). Jesus, now, fully entered His ministry, His journey to Sychar of Samaria giving evidence.

### I. A Providential Departure (vv. 1–3)

1. Jesus recognized that the Pharisees were seeking to use Jesus' growing popularity to produce enmity in people's minds between John's ministry and His own, so He departed for Galilee.
  - a. The providence of God is seen at this point in the situation which led to Jesus' departure for Galilee.
  - b. The Pharisees saw an opportunity to use Jesus' growing popularity to polarize the two ministries. Jesus sought to minimize the potential damage by departing again for Galilee.
2. An issue is raised here: the Synoptics report the calling of the disciples occurred *after* Jesus returned to Galilee and commenced His Galilean ministry (Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 1:14, 16–20; Luke 5:1–11; 27–32; 6:12–16). This is a problem only for those who believe that Jesus began His ministry in Galilee. The problem is easily resolved when one understands that the *calling* of the disciples in the Synoptics was their official *call* to Christ's service as His *apostles* (Matthew 10:2; Luke 6:13).

### II. A Divine Appointment (vv. 4–6)

1. Jesus *must* pass through Samaria (v. 4).
  - a. Jesus "*had to pass*" through Samaria, which had more to do with divine appointment than geography.

Many think that Jesus chose a route that was not the normal route from Judea into Galilee. Josephus, the Jewish historian, puts that notion to rest, showing that although antipathy between the Jews and Samaritans was strong, practicality prevailed; the Jews preferred the shorter route through Samaria. Thus, the "*had to*" of Jesus' trip through Samaria had more to do with a providential meeting than the practicality of the shorter route to Galilee.
  - b. The "*had to*" also focused on the preliminary stages of God's plan to call out a people for His name from every nation of earth.

John contrasts two very different people: the one, *Nicodemus*, a Jew, a man, and a ruler in his religious sect; the *unnamed* was a woman, a Samaritan, and a moral outcast. They had one thing in common—*they both needed Jesus*.
2. The journey took Jesus to Sychar of Samaria and to the curb of an historically famous well (vv. 5, 6).
  - a. Who were the Samaritans and why they were despised by the Judeans?

Samaria was the territory formerly occupied by the northern kingdom of Israel. The name came from the city Israel's King Omri chose to be the capital for the northern kingdom. When the Assyrians captured the northern kingdom in 722 B. C., they deported Israelites of any importance and, in turn, repopulated the region with foreigners who intermarried with those left in the land. This foreign influence also corrupted the faith of the remaining Israelites with elements of their own ancestral religion. Thus, when Judah returned from the Babylonian captivity, they rejected their northern neighbors as racially and theologically corrupted. The Samaritans developed their own heritage based on the Pentateuch only and worshiped at a rival temple built on Mount Gerizim about 400 B. C.

b. The historic link to Jacob

In Genesis 48:22, Jacob on his deathbed told Joseph, "*Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.*" A contradiction with Genesis 33:19? This apparent discrepancy is resolved considering that Jacob left the area, and, in his absence, the Amorites seized it. Jacob took it back from them, as he described it to Joseph.

c. John makes the connection of Jacob's well to the living water promised by Jesus, springing up to eternal life in those who trust in Jesus. The word for *well* in this verse denotes a running spring; however, in verses 11 and 12, the term is a *cistern*. Jacob's well is both: it is a cistern fed by an underground spring and is still used to this day.

Jesus arrived at the well about noon (the sixth hour) and sat on the curb, exhausted and thirsty from His journey. There He waited for a woman that He knew (2:25) was about to approach alone to draw water—a woman who, like Nicodemus, needed living water springing up to eternal life. Do you have this water?

## Conclusion

Five spiritual truths are interconnected in John's Gospel and demonstrated by John's narratives:

1. Unlike the outward and powerless religion of both Judeans and Samaritans, God is producing a people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (4:23).
2. Those who would be true worshipers must be regenerated by the living breath of the Holy Spirit.
  - 1) Jesus judged religion of both Jews and Samaritans as shallow with beliefs unable to save the worshipers.
  - 2) The narratives of both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman prove that Jesus needs no human witness because He knows the true condition of every heart.
  - 3) Saving faith is impossible without *regeneration*, the work of only the Spirit of God.
3. These reborn worshipers are being gathered by the Lord out of every nation as shown here; but also pointing to the end of the old Jewish economy, replaced by a new and better age with a new and better Adam, Jesus Christ.
4. This new and better Adam is seeking for Himself, a true bride, the church, as figured in the woman at the well.
  - 1) She, like the Gentiles, was a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, but in Christ, she was given equal standing in the covenant of grace (Ephesians 2:19).
  - 2) She, like everyone, was first brought to see her sin and the need for God's gracious provision for it.
  - 3) She, by grace, turned from her former religious tradition to embrace the glorious privilege of true spiritual worship.
5. Observe the frequent references to water, which will take on increasing importance in John's narrative (1:26; 2:8; 3:5; 3:23; 4:10).